

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 CU-02

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SIL-01 /077 W

----- 065140

R 240510Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9616

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 1356

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BM

SUBJECT: STUDENT AND LABOR UNREST

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

1. SUMMARY. OPENING OF UNIVERSITY AND APPROACHING ANNIVERSARY OF LAST JUNE'S LABOR VIOLENCE AS WELL AS DETERIORATING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN URBAN AREAS PROMPTING RUMORS OF INCREASED UNREST IN WORKER AND STUDENT SECTORS. STUDENTS HAVE HAD TWO SMALL CONFRONTATIONS WITH MILITARY AUTHORITIES AND SOME ARRESTS HAVE BEEN ALLEGED. WORKER PROTESTS OVER HIGH COST OF LIVING AND COMMODITY SHORTAGES ARE REPORTED IN AT LEAST A FEW INDUSTRIES IN RANGOON AND COULD SPREAD. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF COALITION BETWEEN THOSE TWO DISSIDENT ELEMENTS, HOWEVER; GUB WELL INFORMED OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CAPABLE AND WILLING TO USE FORCE NECESSARY TO QUELL ANY DISORDERS THAT MIGHT OCCUR. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH THE REOPENING OF REMAINING UNIVERSITIES IN EARLY MAY AND THE APPROACH OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF LAST JUNE'S CLASHES BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND LABOR WHICH RESULTED IN 23 DEATHS, RUMORS ARE CIRCULATING ABOUT RENEWED PUBLIC DISORDERS. ON THE UNIVERSITY  
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FRONT, THERE HAVE BEEN TWO INCIDENTS IN WHICH AT LEAST SOME

STUDENTS HAVE CONFRONTED MILITARY AUTHORITIES; ON MAY 10 PROTESTING ALLEGED POLICE BRUTALITY (RANGOON 1243) AND, ON MAY 19 ENGAGING IN A SMALL DEMONSTRATION AGAINST MILITARY SENTRIES NEAR THE CAMPUS. (RANGOON 1339). NOW RUMORED IS A MONK-FEEDING CEREMONY TO BE HELD AT CONVOCATION HALL MAY 24 (A RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY), TO COMMEMORATE STUDENT CASUALTIES OF DECEMBER ALTHOUGH PERMISSION FOR THE CEREMONY HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN DENIED. STUDENTS HAVE ALSO ALLEGEDLY DEMANDED FROM THE RECTOR A LIST OF THOSE KILLED DURING THE CAMPUS TAKEOVER (WE HAVE NO FIRM INFORMATION OF ANY FATALITIES DURING THE MOVE ONTO THE CAMPUS ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE ONE OR TWO OCCURRED.) TO COUNTER THE STUDENT UNREST, GUB APPEARS TO BE FOLLOWING STRATEGY OF AVOIDING DIRECT CONFRONTATION (SENTRIES WERE WITHDRAWN DURING THE MAY 19 EPISODE) ON THE ONE HAND WHILE QUIETLY DETAINING STUDENT ACTIVISTS OR POTENTIAL LEADERS ON THE OTHER. THUS, WHILE STUDENT ANTI-PATHY TO THE GUB REMAINS STRONG, THE STUDENT BODY LACKS THE LEADERSHIP TO CHANNEL THESE FEELINGS INTO EFFECTIVE PROTEST.

3. DURING DCM'S FAREWELL CALL ON EDUCATION MINISTER DR. KHIN MAUNG WIN MAY 23, UNIVERSITY SITUATION WAS DISCUSSED. MINED, WHILE AWARE OF RECENT INCIDENTS TENDED DISMISS THEIR IMPORTANCE. HE ASSERTED THAT STUDENTS WERE "BLOWING OFF STEAM" AS EXAMS APPROACHED AND THAT ANY SERIOUS PROBLEMS WOULD BE CAUSED BY OUTSIDERS SUCH AS MONKS, "COMMUNISTS" ETC. HE ADMITTED THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY MET WITH MEDICAL STUDENTS TO EXPLAIN GUB POLICIES, AND REFUSED TO SPECULATE ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER DISTURBANCES.

4. ON THE LABOR SIDE, PROTEST HAS BEEN GROWING IN RECENT WEEKS OVER THE HIGH COST OF LIVING AND SHORTAGE OF BASIC COMMODITIES. THIS ORIGINALLY CENTERED AT THE GOVERNMENT-OWNED JUTE MILL IN RANGOON WHERE SLOW DOWNS AND ABSENTEEISM HAVE SHARPLY REDUCED PRODUCTION AND HAS NOW SPREAD TO THE NEARBY THAMAING TEXTILE MILL AND THE INSEIN RAILWAY REPAIR SHOP AS WELL (THESE PLANTS WERE CENTRAL TO THE MAY AND JUNE DISTURBANCES OF LAST YEAR.) THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT UNREST MAY BE SPREADING TO SOME OTHER INDUSTRIES IN RANGOON AND PERHAPS IN MANDALAY ALSO. WORKERS ARE DEMANDING AN INCREASE IN FOOD RATIONS FROM THE PLANT COOPS, ESPECIALLY RICE RATHER THAN WAGE INCREASES (THE EXTRA RATIONS AMOUNT TO A PAY HIKE SINCE THE GOODS CAN BE SOLD ON THE BLACK MARKET AT A CONSIDERABLE PROFIT.) THERE ARE ALSO INDICATIONS THAT LABOR MAY

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ATTEMPT TO COMMEMORATE ANNIVERSARY OF DEATH OF FALLEN COMRADES. THUS FAR, THE GUB APPEARS TO BE AVOIDING DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH THE WORKERS AND SOME INCREASES IN FOOD ALLOTMENTS HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN GRANTED. NONETHELESS, AS THE JUNE 6 ANNIVERSARY APPROACHES, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE UNREST WILL SPREAD OR THE DEMANDS ESCALATE. CERTAINLY THE PRICES OF BASIC COMMODITIES ARE HIGHER NOW THAN AT THE TIME OF THE 1974 DISTURBANCES; WE ESTIMATE 30-40 PERCENT.

5. A COALITION OF STUDENT AND LABOR PROTEST AGAINST THE GUB POLICIES APPEARS IMPROBABLE. THE STUDENTS MADE NO SIGNIFICANT

MOVE TO SUPPORT LABOR'S DEMANDS LAST MAY AND JUNE AND CAMPUS UNREST SURROUNDING THE U THANT BURIAL DID NOT CARRY OVER TO THE LABOR SECTOR. THE GUB HAS BEEN FAIRLY SUCCESSFUL IN KEEPING THESE FORCES DIVIDED. DURING THE DECEMBER DEMONSTRATIONS THE GUB REPORTEDLY USED BSPP CADRE TO SPREAD THE WORD AT THE INDUSTRIAL PLANTS THAT SUPPORT FOR THE STUDENT CAUSE COULD WEAKEN THE CASE FOR THEIR ECONOMIC DEMANDS AND THE ALLOCATION OF RICE THROUGH PLANT COOPS WAS INCREASED. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SECTORS IN THE INTERIM. LABOR, LIKE THE STUDENT BODY, ALSO LACKS EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP.

6. IN SHORT, UNREST OF A DEGREE TO THREATEN GUB STABILITY REMAINS UNLIKELY, THOUGH WE CANNOT RULE OUT SOME DELIBERATE OR ACCIDENTAL MOVE BY LABOR AND/OR STUDENTS WHICH COULD LEAD TO CONFRONTATION AND VIOLENCE. WHILE ANTI-GOVERNMENT FEELING IS WIDESPREAD IN BOTH GROUPS, AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS FOR THE URBAN DWELLER CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE, WE HAVE NO DOUBTS ABOUT THE GUB'S CAPACITY AND WILLINGNESS TO PUT DOWN ANY UPRISINGS SHOULD THEY OCCUR. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE GUB IS WELL INFORMED ABOUT CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS BOTH IN INDUSTRY AND ON THE CAMPUS AND, WHILE NOT SEEKING CONFRONTATION, IS QUITE PREPARED TO USE WHATEVER FORCE MAY BE NECESSARY TO CONTAIN THEM. LABOR AND STUDENTS TOO ARE WELL AWARE OF THIS WILLINGNESS HAVING EXPERIENCED IT FIRST HAND WITHIN THE PAST YEAR AND THIS MAY SERVE TO LIMIT THEIR PROTESTATIONS WITHIN PERMISSABLE BOUNDS.

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